

A
S E R M O N

Preach'd before the

Q U E E N

A T

St. JAMES's CHAPEL,

On Wednesday, March 15, 17⁹²/₁₀.

B E I N G

The Day appointed by HER MAJESTY for a General FAST and HUMILIATION, to be observ'd in a most Solemn and Devout Manner, for obtaining the Pardon of our Sins, and imploring God's Blessing and Assistance on the Arms of Her Majesty and Her Allies engag'd in the present War; and for Restoring and Perpetuating Peace, &c.

By ROBERT MOSS, D. D. Chaplain in Ordinary to Her MAJESTY, and Preacher to the Honourable Society of *Grays-Inn*.

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[31]

W E R M O N

Eccl. VII. xii.

Because Sentence against an Evil Work is not
executed speedily; therefore the Heart of
the Sons of Men is fully set in them to do
Evil.

THE SECOND CHAPTE

THE Iniquity and Corruption of Mankind
is much more fully comprehended of bees
than of men; for in this, That
Men are so far from humbly accepting the
manifest Tokens of Gods Goodness and Loving Kind-
ness towards them, they are much more industri-
ously to set themselves to destroy what lies in them,
the glorious Beings of his Providence, and to pervert
those very Means which the Divine Wisdom hath
thought fit to use, the better to keep them within the
bounds of their Obedience, and to prevent from the
Errors of their Ways, and to make them happy both
here and hereafter.

And among the many tokens of this Kind, none
more Notorious, none more Disagreeable to the
which the Preacher here Reminds us, than the
Observation furnished us with Examples of, which
hardening themselves in their Wickedness, and
tion of Impunity. Which is a great temptation to
reasonably and innocently build upon their undisturb-
Experience of Gods Providence and Forbearance for the
time past.

Because Sentence against an Evil Work is not executed
speedily; therefore the Heart of the Sons of Men is fully
set in them to do Evil. That is,

“ Because sinners are not immediately seized by Ven-
geance and halloo, as it were, to publick Execution;
“ because



Eccles. VIII. xi.

Because Sentence against an Evil Work is not executed speedily; therefore the Heart of the Sons of Men is fully set in them to do Evil.

THE Degeneracy and Corruption of Mankind, so much and so justly complain'd of, betrays it self in nothing more than in this, That Men are so far from thankfully accepting the manifold Tokens of God's Goodness, and Loving-Kindness towards them, that they are much apter Industriously to set themselves to Defeat, what lyes in them, the gracious Designs of his Providence, and to pervert those very Means which the Divine Wisdom hath thought fit to use, the better to keep them within the Bounds of their Obedience, to reclaim them from the Errors of their Ways, and to make them happy both here and hereafter.

- And among the many Instances of this Kind, none more Notorious, none more Disingenuous than that which the Preacher here Remarks, and every Day's Observation furnishes fresh Examples of; namely, Mens hardening themselves in their Wickedness upon Presumption of Impunity. Which Presumption they most unreasonably and impiously Build upon their undeserv'd Experience of God's Patience and Forbearance for the time past.

Because Sentence against an evil Work is not executed speedily; therefore the Heart of the Sons of Men is fully set in them to do Evil.— That is,

“ Because Sinners are not immediately seiz'd by Vengeance, and hal'd, as it were, to publick Execution ;

A SERMON Preach'd

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“because such Examples of Terror are not perpetual-
 “ly before Mens Eyes; therefore They who are wick-
 “edly bent, hug themselves in their Security; They
 “grow careless and fearless, not dreaming of any Dan-
 “ger; or at least putting the Evil Day off to a very
 “great Distance, and flattering themselves, that the
 “God with whom they have to do is exceeding Mer-
 “ciful, even to Easiness, and that the slightest and
 “the latest Repentance will be sufficient to appease
 “him.

These, and such as These, seem to be the *Thoughts*
 that presumptuous Sinners cherish in their Hearts, to
 embolden themselves in their Sins; if that deserves to
 pass for *Thinking*, which is indeed the Effect of a
 most wretched Infatuation, and is equally injurious to
 God's Honour, and pernicious to their own Souls. In
 order therefore, both to wipe off the foul Imputation
 that is cast upon Providence by such harden'd Offen-
 ders, and to give some Check to the Progress of da-
 ring Impiety, I shall, in this Discourse,

I. Apply my self to prove, that the ordinary Pro-
 cedure of Divine Providence, in delaying or suspend-
 ing the Punishment of Sinners in this World, is agree-
 able to the truest Measures of Goodness, Wisdom, and
 Justice. And,

II. As consequent upon this, I shall shew, That it is
 a very unjust Objection to a very Kind Providence, to
 imagine, that This is any Encouragement to Sin; and
 a very grievous Abuse for Sinners to make it so. And
 then,

III. I shall intimate, what Construction and Use
 Men, in Reason and Conscience, ought to make of
 such God's providential Dispensations. And This I
 shall offer with a particular Regard to Our selves, and
 the Occasion of the present Solemnity.

I. I shall apply my self to prove, that the ordinary
 Procedure of Divine Providence, in delaying or suspend-
 ing the Punishment of Sinners in this World, is agree-
 able

able to the trueſt Measures of Goodneſs, Wiſdom, and Juſtice.

But, before I enter upon the Proof of this Point, it may not be amiſs to premiſe a judicious Obſervation of *Plutarch*, a learned Heathen, who hath himſelf treated on this very Argument. † And he Prefaces his Diſquiſition with this Caution, that the eaſieſt and the ſureſt way of answering all Difficulties, is to ſay, That God is the only wiſe Phyſician, who knows how to apply the Remedy to Wickedneſs, as every one's Caſe requires, in the proper Seafon, and the moſt effectual Manner. It would become Us therefore, even according to this Heathen, to acquieſce in God's Method, though we were unable to give any ſatisfactory Account of it. And yet He attempted, and not unſucceſſfully, to account for it from the meer Light of Nature; and therefore We, who have Revelation to guide and enlighten our Enquiries, need not doubt of finding all reaſonable Satisfaction, and clearly diſcovering, how agreeable this Method is to the trueſt Measures of Goodneſs, Wiſdom, and Juſtice.

† Vide Plur.
Need of God's
See Book of
Time of day;
Pag. 549, 550.

Thoſe I conceive to be the trueſt Measures of Goodneſs, Wiſdom, and Juſtice, which are every way worthy of God, and entirely conſiſtent with each other.

For God being infinite in Theſe, as in all other his Perfections, it muſt never be ſuppos'd, that the Exerciſe of his Goodneſs ſhould be any Impeachment to his Wiſdom, or Obſtruction to his Juſtice: And as little is it to be ſuppos'd, that his Wiſdom ſhould ever deviate in the leaſt from his Juſtice, or Goodneſs; or his Juſtice, again, act ſeparate from either of the other Two.

Now it will appear, upon Examination, that, in delaying or ſuſpending the Punishment of Sinners in this World, there is a moſt admirable Harmony of Divine Goodneſs, Wiſdom, and Juſtice.

And

And this will appear from these Reasons following.
(1.) Because the contrary Method would have been altogether unreasonable and impracticable. (2.) Because there are several excellent Purposes serv'd in this way, which perhaps could not otherwise be so well pursued. (3.) Because there is a sufficient Discouragement to Sin notwithstanding.

(1.) The contrary Method would have been altogether unreasonable and impracticable. By saying it would have been unreasonable and impracticable, I mean at least, that it were not to be reconcil'd with all the clearest Notions we can frame to our selves of the Divine Perfections; nor with the plain Intendment of Providence and Grace, both in Governing and Redeeming a World of Sinners.

For whatever absolute Power, and rigid Justice, might do or justify, This is certain, that the Government of the World supposes its Preservation; and Both must be the equal Care of a wise and good Providence. But if it were necessary to the well-governing the World, that Sinners, upon the Commission of any Sin, should immediately be seiz'd in the very Act, and punish'd to the Extremity, the degenerate Race of Mankind had long since been rooted out, and the Earth wholly dispeopled. So that, upon this Supposition, God could not govern the World without destroying it; which were such a Defect of Wisdom, or such an Inconsistency between Wisdom and Justice, as cannot be admitted in a Being that is absolutely perfect.

It is true, God did once sweep away a whole Race of Sinners (eight Persons only excepted) by a Deluge of Waters, which stands Recorded for a Monument of

his Vengeance to all succeeding Generations. * But he promised, that he would

not any more smite every Thing living, as he had done; and that while the Earth remaineth, Seed-time and Harvest, and Cold and Heat, and Summer and Winter, and Day and Night should not cease. And

this

this his Promise, as it flowed from his infinite Goodness, so was it founded upon this wise Reason, that such extream Rigour, had it been repeated, could not well have been made to consist with the Preservation of the World; nor indeed with the Nature and State of Mankind, by whom it is Inhabited.

For it is to be remembred, that Man was created a free Agent, capable of serving and glorifying God; and that he was sent into this World, to perform this reasonable Service; and to give Proof of his Ingenuity and Obedience. But this End had in great measure been defeated, if it had been the fix'd Decree of Heaven, to punish Sinners to the uttermost, without the least Reprieve or Respite. For though the Terror of certain and sudden Vengeance might, must indeed, have overaw'd Men into a Compliance with their Duty; yet this had been no proper Trial of Creatures endow'd with an ingenuous Freedom; nor had there been much of Virtue in such their Obedience, wherein their natural Liberty, if not wholly superseded, had at least been over-born by a Degree of Violence hardly possible to be resisted. And it is not to be imagin'd, that a wise God would have created Man in Nature free, on purpose, as it were, to subject Him, in his whole Conduct, to the Fetters of a fatal Necessity.

Besides, such a Rigorous and hasty Execution of Sinners, as we are now supposing, would have been flatly contrary to God's declar'd Will and Counsel, relating to Mankind. For no sooner had our first Parents sinned, and thereby forfeited the Title which God had given them to Happiness and Immortality, but that, in Compassion to them, and their Posterity included in them, He gave them the comfortable Promise of a *Messiah*, and enter'd into a second Covenant with them, the main Condition of which (on our Part) is unfeigned Repentance. This Condition we are frequently call'd upon in Scripture to perform: God's Prophets do most earnestly inculcate it: *St. John Baptist*, the Fore-runner

of Christ, prepar'd the Way for his Kingdom by this Doctrine: In one Word, Repentance and Forgiveness is the very Doctrine that the Saviour of the World himself Preach'd, and left in Charge to his Apostles to propagate through all Nations.

Since then Remission of Sins upon Repentance is the undoubted Privilege of the Covenant in Christ; since God demands the One of Us, in order to confer the Other upon Us, it is plain, there must be a competent Time allowed for our Probation and Recovery: Because otherwise the Promise of God, and this inestimable Privilege, would be of no Avail to us. But now, if Vengeance were always ready to lay hold on the Sinner, and dispatch him out of hand, it is as plain, there would be no Place left for Repentance. And, at that Rate, all the pathetical Exhortations and Invitations to Repentance, so often reiterated in the Bible, had stood there to no purpose. Which is too harsh and impious a Thought, to be entertain'd concerning the God of Truth, as well as Goodness, Wisdom, and Justice.

Wherefore I conclude, that such a Method of punishing Sinners, would have been unreasonable and impracticable: Because, admitting the Supposal, the World could not have subsisted; or, if it could, Men would have been deprived of their natural Freedom, and constrain'd to be good against their Will; (which is in truth scarce Good at all) or else they would have been plung'd at once into irrecoverable Ruin, without the Opportunity or Possibility of Repenting.

Whereas God's Patience in bearing with Sinners, and respiting the fatal Sentence, is fairly consistent with the Preservation of the World, and its good Government too, as we shall see clearly in the Sequel: And it is likewise accommodated to the Nature and State of Mankind, as they are free Agents, and upon their Probation; and no less to the Tenour of the Covenant of Grace, which leaves Room, and affords Time, for their

their Repentance. This therefore is the Procedure, that should seem to fall in exactly well with the truest Measures of Goodness, Wisdom, and Justice, acting together in perfect Harmony. But

(2.) This Point may be farther confirm'd and illustrated, from the several excellent Purposes, that are more effectually serv'd in this Method of proceeding, than perhaps otherwise they could be.

As for Instance first, This is the Method that keeps up the Virtues and Graces of good Men in constant Exercise, and greatly helps towards their Continuance and Improvement in well-doing.

For if wicked Men were immediately snatch'd away upon the Commission of any Wickedness, and made to cease from the Face of the Earth; and good Men were to be left in full and quiet Possession of the World, without any Molestation from bad Neighbours, it may well be question'd, whether so much Ease and Peace, and undisturb'd Enjoyment, would not be dangerous, and even hurtful to them. For Paradise seems to have been made only for a State of perfect Innocence; Our lapsed Nature plainly stands in need of Discipline, but cannot bear Indulgence: And such an Indulgent Providence might be too liable to be abus'd, and minister Occasion, even in Good Men, to Security and Sloth; if not to a Fondness for this present World, and a Forgetfulness of that which is to come.

But since, by God's Permission, the Good and Bad live promiscuously together; since the former are often expos'd like Sheep in the midst of Wolves; since Treachery and Dissimulation, Slandering and Backbiting, Oppression and Revenge, are such busie Actors upon this Stage of Disorder, and make human Life so unquiet and unsafe, This, tho' sometimes a Vexation to Righteous Souls, helps to loosen their Affections from this Earth, and place them on Things above: This tries and strengthens their Faith, and fixes their Trust in God: This trains them up to Patience and Resignation,

to Mortification and Self-denial; it purges off all their Dross, and makes them more Spiritual and Heavenly-minded, and fitter for the Fruition of Cœlestial Joys. And certainly that Method of dealing with Sinners in this World, must be most agreeable to Goodness, Wisdom and Justice, which contributes so much towards the exercising, refining and perfecting God's own Elect.

And again, which is still more, this Method of Providence is not only beneficial to good Men, but even to the Wicked: For as it gives them All Space for Repentance, so it makes them Monitors and Remembrancers to each Other. It may indeed seem strange, that an impenitent Sinner should become a Teacher of that Righteousness, which he is not willing to learn: But 'tis no wonder at all, that one Sinner should be a Plague to another. For they all naturally are so; the Objects of their Lusts set them at eternal Odds; They are perpetually contending for Power, Wealth, and Honour; Envyng, Supplanting, Overturning one another. And sometimes it so proves, that the very Sparks of this hot Contention afford them Light enough to discern, (especially when they are worsted by their Adversaries, and defeated of their Hopes) that the Fruit of these things is nothing but Vanity and Vexation of Spirit. And this seasonable Discovery of their Folly may (and by God's Grace often does) lead them to a Sense of their Sins, and help to recover them out of the Snare of the Devil.

Nay, it is Observable, that to punish Sin by Sin, is one of the severest Scourges in God's Hand; and that which causes the most sensible Smart, and sometimes the deepest Compunction. Thus when *David* was punish'd for his own Adultery and Murder by the Rebellion of his darling Son *Abfalon*, how was he abashed and confounded! He fled away in great Consternation, he covered his Head, and went up by the Ascent of Mount

Oliver,

Olivet, Weeping and Bare-foot: And when Shimei came forth to meet him at Bahurim, and cursed still as he came, saying, The Lord hath delivered thy Kingdom into the Hand of thy Son Absalon; and behold thou art taken in thy Mischief, because thou art a bloody Man.

The Sense of his Guilt, and the Weight of God's Afflicting Hand, made him submit to the Indignity, and say patiently — *So let him Curse: Behold my Son which came forth of my Bowels seeketh my Life, how much more may this Benjamite do it? Let him alone, and let him Curse; for the Lord hath bidden him.* And thus, by the just Permission, and wise Direction of a good God, Sin very sharply and effectually corrects Sin; and one Man's Disease proves another Man's Cure.

It is further remarkable, that the Designs and Attempts of wicked Men, even when seemingly contriv'd at by Providence, and suffer'd most to prosper, have the more eminently conduc'd to God's Glory, and the Good of Mankind. Thus the unnatural Cruelty and Revenge of Joseph's Brethren, tho' proceeding from the worst Intention on their Part, was by God meant for Good; and he was thereby put in a Capacity of harbouring and supporting his aged Father, and the whole Family in their Distress, and saving much People alive: And This was preparatory to a long Train of Wonders, by which their Posterity were attended and conducted, out of Egypt, through the Wilderness, into the Land of Canaan. Thus the Dispersion and Captivities of the Israelites afterward, especially their long Captivity in Babylon, help'd to spread the Knowledge of the true God far and wide, and to make his Name and Power confess'd among the Heathens; which gradually prepar'd the World for the Reception, of the Messiah in the Fulness of God's due Time. Thus the violent Persecution of the Christian Religion, tho' levell'd at its Extirpation, became (through the Invincible Fortitude and Patience of the Martyrs)

Martyrs) a most glorious Testimony to its Truth and Excellency, and the marvellous Means of its more abundant Encrease. And so in many other Instances besides, both of a publick and private Nature, the wicked Devices of Mens Hearts have been made subservient to God's establish'd Counsel, and to very unexpected Turns of Providence, quite contrary to the Intention of such evil Instruments.

And doubtless, that Forbearance of Sinners, which is not only calculated (as was shown before) for the common Benefit both of Good and Bad Men, but also productive of much unthought of Good besides, and conducing to the fuller Display of God's Glory, must be adjusted according to the exactest Measures of Goodness, Wisdom, and Justice. There can no possible Doubt remain of this, if we consider,

(3.) That which we cannot but discern, *viz.* That there is a sufficient Discouragement to Sin, notwithstanding God's Patience and Long-suffering towards Sinners.

For when all is done, there is no such thing as Ease, or Peace, or Safety, for the wicked. Guilt will sit hard upon the Mind, and fill it with ill-boding Thoughts, and frightful Apprehensions. And the very Expectation of Vengeance to ensue, is it self a present, and a grievous Torment. And this is so much the Effect of natural Conscience, that the Heathens themselves had a feeling Sense it, and give us very affecting Descriptions of the troublesome Inmate.

Plutarch sets it forth by an Illustration, which (by the way) gives light to a Passage in Scripture relating to our Blessed Saviour, "** Every Malefactor, says he,*

** Plutarch. "that suffers bodily Execution, carries out his own Cross: But, Wickedness is the skillful Artificer, that of it self both furnishes and frames the Instruments of its own Mercy; Shame, Fear, and Remorse, and never-ceasing Repentance."*

before the QUEEN.

" Perturbation and Distraction. † And
 " *Tacitus* imagines, That if the Breasts † *Tacitus.*
 " of Tyrants could be laid open, we might *Annal. lib.*
 " see them full of Lashes and Gashes; *vi.*
 " the Mind being as liable to be mangled and torn by
 " Cruelty, Lust, and Evil Machinations, as the Body is
 " by the Stripes of a Whip. * And *Juve-*
 " *nal* the Poet won't allow so much as the * *Juvenal.*
 " Thought, that those Men escape with Im- *Satyr. xiii.*
 " punity, who are left under the secret Ter- *192. &c.*
 " ror and Scourge of a guilty Mind, a Tormenter deaf
 " to all Entreaty. And All the grave Heathen Writers
 concur in the same Sentiments. Now if such be the Hor-
 ror of Guilt, as reflected from the Glass of meer Na-
 tural Conscience, much more must it be, when awa-
 ken'd and heighten'd by the Threatnings of that God,
 who is *greater than our Hearts, and knoweth all Things.*
 So that in good truth, the Sinner doth not go unpun-
 nished, when he is left in his own Hands; because, as
 long as he carries a Conscious Mind about him, he is
 sure to do severe Execution upon himself.

But besides, God's Temporal Judgments are very
 frequently executed upon incorrigible Sinners; so fre-
 quently, that it is enough to convince the Boldest of
 them all, that there is no Security in Sin. And some-
 times they are so visibly mark'd with the very Cha-
 racter of those Sins for which they were Inflicted,
 that they cannot but extort the Confession of such as
 are immediately concern'd, and Command the awful
 Regard of others.

So the cruel *Adonibezek* read his Crime in his Pu-
 nishment, and said, *Threescore and ten Kings, having*
their Thumbs and their great Toes cut off, gathered their
Meat under my Table: As I have done, so God hath re-
quited me. So the Haughty *Haman*, in Plotting the
 Destruction of *Mordecai* and the whole People of the
Jews, became most unexpectedly the Author and Pro-
 curer of his own Downfal and their Establishment. So
 the

the vain *Herod* was eaten with Worms alive, and perished in a more miserable Manner than other Mortals, because he receiv'd the Blasphemous Applauses of the People, and gave not God the Glory. So the Arch-Apostate *Julian*, being mortally wounded by an Arrow from an unseen Hand, died with a *Vicisti Galilee* in his Mouth, owning with Rage and Despair, that the Saviour, whom he had renounc'd, derided, and defied, was now his Avenger and Destroyer.

And, beside these extraordinary Examples, it is Matter of common Observation made good by numberless Events, that bloody-minded Tyrants seldom die an unbloody Death; that Murder seldom passes undiscover'd or unreveng'd; that the Oppressor and Extortioner, who is so greedy of Gain, troubleth his own House, and inherits but the Wind—— an Estate that is hardly capable of Settlement or Entail—— And so in many other like Cases. Daring and presumptuous Sinners therefore are so far from being Exempt from God's Temporal Judgments, that they are in perpetual Danger of them.

But, however it may fare with them here, Beloved, (I use St. Peter's Words to you) be not ignorant of this one Thing, that one Day is with the Lord as a thousand Years, and a thousand Years as one Day. The Lord is not slack concerning his Promise, [no, nor yet his Threats] as some Men count Slackness, but is long-suffering towards us, not willing that Any should perish, but that All should come to Repentance. But if Men will continue obstinately Impenitent, their Damnation neither slumbreth nor lingreth: It is but a Moment of Time, (nothing in God's Account, nothing in Comparison of what is to follow) and They shall enter upon a vast Eternity, which no Numbers can reckon, nor Conception reach; an Eternity of Torments, Torments such as no Heart can endure to think of, no Hope can mitigate, and nothing can prevent but a timely Repentance. For which Repentance, though there is

Space allowed to the Sinner in this Life, yet it cannot be denied, if any Sense of Misery or Dread of Danger can affect Men, that Sin is sufficiently discouraged, by the cruel Pangs of a guilty Conscience, by the frequent Execution of God's Exemplary Vengeance in this World, and the fearful looking for of *Judgment and fiery Indignation* in that which is to come. Which compleatly demonstrates, what I propos'd, that there is a most admirable Temperature of Goodness, Wisdom, and Justice, in this whole Procedure.

II. As consequent upon This, I should now shew, that it is a very unjust Objection to a very kind Providence, to imagine that God's Patience and Forbearance is any Encouragement to Sin; and a most grievous Abuse for Sinners to make it so.

But This is so direct, and so necessary a Consequence from the former Proposition, that I need not spend Words or Time to enforce it. For if the whole Procedure be so perfectly agreeable to all the truest Measures of Goodness, Wisdom and Justice, as I have prov'd by divers Reasons, by one in particular (which was the last insisted on) that directly precludes this Objection; then it must be a notorious Abuse for Sinners, either to Think, or Act so unreasonably and perversely.

One would hardly imagine it possible indeed, that any Sinner in his right Wits should object against Providence for want of strict Justice; when 'tis plain, if Things were otherwise, he might much more reasonably complain for want of that Mercy, the Benefit of which he now Enjoys, or may at least, if he do not neglect it.

But, as God's Infinite Holiness makes it impossible that He could, so it is down-right absurd to think that He should spare Sinners, in such manner as to encourage them in their Sins, and lull them asleep in Security; when at the same time, He hath taken a abundant Care to lay all possible Restraints upon them, that

that do not violate their natural Freedom; and to awaken them by the Checks and Menaces of their own Consciences; by the Terror of his Temporal Judgments, and the much more terrible Denunciation of Eternal Punishment.

And it is certainly the most preposterous Abuse of God's unmerited Goodness, for Men to construe it so much to his Dishonour, and force it, as it were, to minister to their own Presumption. When He is pleas'd to spare and to forbear, to wait for their Repentance, and invite them to it, it is both Ingratitude and Insolence to conclude from hence, that He is a Tame and Easy Being, that may be insulted at Pleasure; and therefore to Sin against him with an high Hand, and cast his Laws contemptuously behind their Backs. It is Madness to forget that God is Just, because his Justice is temper'd with Mercy; it is Senseless not to consider, that to trespass upon Infinite Goodness and Clemency is the most provoking Aggravation of Sin; and will at last be recompenc'd with a proportionable Punishment, that will be still encreasing as the Guilt encreases.

Vain is it then, for any presumptuous Sinners to think, that they shall escape the Judgement of God: Most wretchedly vain, to despise the Riches of his Goodness and Forbearance, not knowing that the Goodness of God leadeth them to Repentance; but, after the Hardness of their impenitent Hearts, treasuring up to themselves Wrath against the Day of Wrath, and the Revelation of the Righteous Judgement of God. If any can be so Ignorant, their Ignorance is grossly affected, or stupid; if any so Harden'd, their Obstinacy, it is to be fear'd, is incurable; if any so Desperate, their Punishment, sooner or later, will be intolerable.

III. I come now, in the last Place, to intimate what Construction and Use Men, in Reason and Conscience, ought to make of such God's Dispensations; which

I shall consider with a particular Regard to our selves, and the present Conjunction.

1. And first, in framing a Judgment upon such the Dispensations of Providence, this should be an establish'd Rule, that how long soever wicked Men may be suffer'd, or how prosperous soever Wickedness may seem to be, it ought not to be matter of Scandal to Us, nor tempt Us to charge God foolishly. This Rule is given Us by the Royal Preacher himself, *Eccles. 3. 8. If thou seest the Oppression of the Poor, and violent perverting of Judgment and Justice in a Province; marvel not at the matter: for he that is higher than the highest Regardeth, and there be higher than They.* And whenever these or any the like Enormities are permitted, tho' They are such as do much disturb the Quiet, and undermine the Safety of Societies, and therefore might seem to require the speedier Regulation; yet We may perfectly rest our selves upon this Assurance, that They are all under the Governance and Restraint of God's Over-ruling Power, and the Inspection of his All-piercing Eye, which, even whilst it seemeth to wink at them, is narrowly watching them; and that too, 'tis most probable, in order to their severer Punishment. But however, since God is a Vigilant Observer of These and all Others the Iniquities he permits, it ought to be a firm and standing Conclusion with Us, that such his Permission of Sinners is founded upon weighty Reasons; which, tho' not presently obvious even to our serious Enquiries, much less to our vain Curiosity, must always be presumed to be right Worthy of himself, and conducive to the great Ends of his Providential Government.

What then, tho' Oppression and Persecution be sometimes suffer'd to trample upon the Necks of the Innocent and Helpless? What, tho' Tyranny be sometimes permitted, like a strong Man rejoicing to run a Race, to make mad Havock where it sways, and bear down all Law and Liberty with Violence? What, tho' the Ambition

bition of Princes be sometimes cast as a Firebrand among the Nations, to set the Affairs of the World and the whole Course of Nature, as it were, all in a Combustion? Are not all these Scourges in the Hand of God? And is it any wonder, that he should employ such willing Messengers on his own Errand, and send Rapaciousness, Pride, and Cruelty, to visit for Profaneness, Carnal Security, and Hypocrisie? And can God want to be justify'd, is he not sufficiently clear when he judgeth, whoever they be that are ordain'd to feel the Weight of his Judgments, or employ'd to be the Instruments of inflicting them?

We of this Nation have been subjected to the Alarms and Terrors, to the doubtful Contingencies and Events, to the certain and vast Expence of Blood and Treasure, that must of necessity attend a tedious War; I say (excepting the short Interval of an insidious Peace) we have been subjected to these Calamities of War for near twenty Years together: For War, be it never so Just and Honourable, is still more or less Calamitous, and ought ever to be reckon'd among the Judgments of God. But we can easily account to our Selves for all that We have suffer'd under it; and we must in all Humility confess, that God is just in visiting Us with this Judgment, such a sinful People as we are, even tho' we should take the Liberty to suppose our Enemies to be much greater Sinners than our Selves. For, as an Excess of Guilt in them is no Proof of our Innocence; so on the other Hand, their Forwardness to become the Instruments of annoying Us, is no Security to them, that they Themselves shall not be destroyed: For so were the *Israelites* of old often and sore distress'd by those very Idolatrous Nations that were Themselves devoted to Destruction.

And if the Enemy with whom we are chiefly engag'd, should still blindly persist in his Hatred against Us, and impotently drive on his furious Designs, now that Providence so plainly seems to have stopp'd his

Career, may we not probably expect to see all the Enterprizes of an aspiring Reign concluded in his shameful and total Overthrow? At least, may we not hope to see this *Leviathan* (*the King over all the Children of Pride*) who hath so long sported himself in the Ruin of his Neighbours, and fatten'd upon the Spoils of Nations; may we not hope to see him forc'd to disgorge his Prey, to give up his unjust Acquisitions, to revoke the Titles of Royalty he hath so vainly bestow'd, and to sue at last for an inglorious Peace, such as may for evermore bind up his Hands, from troubling the Repose, or attempting the Liberties of *Europe*? And, if our own great Unworthiness do not hinder, doth not the happy *Crisis* seem now to be near approaching, when we may actually rejoice to see, the long Arrears of Vengeance for Rapine and Bloodshed paid, where they are most due; and be excited, in a grateful Sense of our own Deliverance, to say with the *Psalmist*, *Verily there is a Reward for the Righteous, verily he is a God that judgeth in the Earth*? Oh! that we may but be found righteous enough to render us capable of so great a Blessing!

2dly. And this is the proper use that Men ought always to make of such God's Dispensations; *i. e.* to turn unto the Lord with their whole Heart, and flee from his Wrath into the Arms of his Mercy. For the Continuance of Favours undeserv'd, and the Suspension of deserved Judgments, is at once a kind Invitation, and a startling Summons to Repentance; which not to hearken to, must argue the utmost pitch of Ingratitude and Perverseness.

And certainly, if ever any Nation or Generation of Men were so graciously invited and summon'd to Repent, or so patiently waited for, *We* are that Nation and Generation---*We* that have been so often spar'd when we might most justly have been punish'd; *We* that have been sometimes encompass'd with Dangers, and alarm'd

with Judgments, hanging directly over our Heads, and just ready to fall upon Us with all their weight, and yet deliver'd by God's outstretched Arm. We that have had so many Mercies multiply'd upon us, so many mighty Works done for us, as might have converted a Nation of Heathens, and brought them long e'er now prostrate upon their Faces, repenting in Sackcloth and Ashes. — And, if after all these repeated Calls, We can still continue Uncircumcis'd both in Heart and Ears, surely we must have put off all sense of Shame and Fear, we must be the most abandon'd of all People, we must be entirely given up to an incorrigible Hardness of Heart.

And if we are not already under that fatal Induration, it is doubtless high time to bethink Our selves, that Mercy abus'd, 'till it be incens'd, will admit of no Intercessor; and that Vengeance, long delay'd but still provok'd, will come upon us like a Fury at last, not to correct but to consume us.

If therefore we have any true Sense of Liberty, any just Dread of Arbitrary Power, let us instantly shake off that heavy Yoke of Bondage, which our Tyrannical Lusts have laid upon us: If we have any regard to our own Safety, let us break off from our Iniquities, which will otherwise be our Ruin: If we have any Reverence for God's holy Name, any real Aversion to Popery, any Value for his true Religion establish'd among us, let us resolve to revive it both in Profession and Practice; let us agree, with one Mind, and one Mouth, zealously to defend it; let us study to adorn it by an irreproachable Life and Conversation. And that the Reformation may be general and effectual, let us, all of us, High and Low, Teacher and Scholar, Magistrates, Ministers, and People, join Hand and Heart in this necessary Work. Let us, before all things, renounce, and, as much as in us lies, rebuke and restrain that Spirit of Infidelity and Profaneness, which vaunts it self so publicly, and defies all the Hosts of the

be the living God; and let us endeavour to cast out that Spirit of Indifferency, and Remissness too, that has been creeping upon us for some time by unperceiv'd Degrees, and has already in a great measure benumm'd our Spiritual Sense; and let us for ever lay aside all Malice, and all Guile, and Hypocrisies, and Envyies, and all Evil-speakings, which cause us, either to nauseate the sincere Milk of the Word, or thro' an ill Digestion to turn even our best Nutriment into Poison.

To be impartial, that no Accursed Thing may Separate between us and our God, nor obstruct our perfect Reconciliation, let us search every One into the very Bottom of our Hearts, and tear from thence those Bosom Sins, that make us at once Disloyal Members both to Church and State. And where Licentiousness has made the widest Breach, there let us be sure to apply our speediest Care, and oppose the strongest Bank; particularly against that Looseness of Opinion that slides so easily into Practice, that removes every Check to Vice, and hath let in Universal Corruption among us; that Intemperance that overflows us like a Deluge; that Softness and Lewdness which emasculates and enfeebles our Youth, and hath almost quench'd all the remaining sparks of Virtue and Bravery; and (which of all things must not be forgotten) that most immoderate Degree of Uncharitableness and Bitterness, which estranges our Hearts from each other, and whets our Tongues like Swords, and hath carried our Dissensions to such an amazing height, as makes the Heart of every true Lover of his Queen and Country bleed with Grief, and quake for Fear.

In sum, let us set our selves to mortifie and subdue all our fleshly Lusts, as this holy Season of Lent, and this solemn Occasion, do Both require. For, whence come Wars and Fightings among you, (says St. James) do they come they not hence, even from your Lusts that war within

within your Members? This is the natural Solution of all that Variance, Emulation, and Sedition, with which we are so divided and distracted: Pride, that arrogant Usurper; Ambition, that desperate Climber; Covetousness, that hasty Gatherer; Luxury, that prodigal Consumer; and Envy, that perpetual Murmurer; These, these are the Troublers of our *Israel*, These are the Incendiaries that set all on fire. Let us therefore withdraw the Fuel that feeds these raging Lusts, that they may no longer burn inwardly to our great Disquiet, nor ever flame out to our Confusion and Destruction; Let us *study all to be quiet*, and *mind every one his own business* in his proper Station; Let us not be *wise in our own Conceits*, nor *mind high things*, but with *Brotherly Love in Honour prefer one another*. And let this be the only, but the noble Strife, among Brethren and Countrymen, who shall do most Good to the Publick; and who shall serve their Queen and Country with the most disinterested Zeal, and uncorrupted Fidelity.

And, for a Conclusion of all, let us, as *St. Paul* exhorts, put up our *Prayers, Supplications, Intercessions and Thanksgivings* for the Queen, and all that are in Authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable Life, in all Godliness and Honesty; that We may never want the Shelter of their kind Protection, nor They the lawful Tribute of our Obedience and Submission; that the Queen's Empire may be firmly Seated in the Hearts of all Her Peop'e, and the People's Duty solidly founded both upon Principle and Affection: That Religion (the best Guardian of Civil Society) may season all our Counsels, and prosper all our Undertakings; that Mercy may distil upon us as the Dew, and Righteousness run down as the Waters; that Probity and Equity may be the Standard of our Proceedings; that Knowledge and Wisdom may be the Stability of our Times, and Union and Concord the Cement

ment of our Government; and that the Glorious Successes of War may be speedily compleated in a happy Peace, never to be eluded by any Art, nor disturb'd by any Violence; and lastly (to crown all our Wishes) that all the Blessings we have been so gallantly contending for, may be transmitted safe to Posterity, and that (according to the wise Provision of our Legislature) a Race of Protestants may never fail to sway the *British* Scepter, as long as the Sun and Moon endure. *Amen:*
 And let all the People say *Amen.*

F I N I S.

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